

7.1 FAA DELAY DATA FOR 1997 AND 1998

Nationally, the FAA reports that around 70 percent of recorded delays are due to bad weather and the resulting degradation in airport system capacity. Another 20 percent of delays are related to high traffic volumes at and around airports¹. Some delays are caused by conditions at a specific airport while other delays are caused by systemwide Air Traffic Control conditions or by the airlines themselves (e.g., late crew, baggage, or other carrier-related activity). Any discussion of delay statistics is hampered by the acknowledged fact that there is currently no system in place that accurately tracks both the causes and amount of delay in a uniform manner. Thus, the simple question of what causes delay does not have a simple answer.

The FAA's Consolidated Operations and Delay Analysis System (CODAS) provides the most detailed information. It counts delays on every flight, no matter how small and includes the difference between an aircraft's actual arrival time and the arrival time listed in the airlines' computer reservation system. It also divides delays into "where caused" and "where taken", meaning which airport caused the delay and at which airport the delay was taken, usually in the form of an ATC imposed groundhold. CODAS was used to estimate various statistics for arrival delay, departure delay, and average flow control (ground hold) delay per flight².

Delay data was developed for 1997 and 1998. California was hard hit by El Niño storms in 1998, and SFO experienced extremely high delays, reflecting the airport's reduced runway capacity when aircraft are required to operate under instrument flight rules. The year 1997 was a relatively good weather year and is also included in the CODAS database. As would be expected, the incidence of delay and the measures showing delay performance were significantly better in 1997. While SFO did experience less delay in 1997, the high average (mean) delay of 14 minutes was still significant and close to the worst in the country, exceeded only by Newark at 16 minutes of average delay and Atlanta with an average of 15 minutes. From the CODAS data, it is also apparent that neither OAK nor SJC currently experience significant delay problems.

¹ Based on flights delayed 15 minutes or more.

² Flow control is an FAA procedure to restrict departures at the origin airport until there is an assured arrival slot at the destination airport.

Table 7-1
Delays at Bay Area Airports

| | SFO | | OAK | | SJC | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|------|---------|------|----------|
| | 1997 | 1998 | 1997 | 1998 | 1997 | 1998 |
| Arrivals | | | | | | |
| Mean | 14 min. (5 th worst) | 21 min. (worst) | | 11 min. | | 11 min. |
| Median | 10 min. | 15 min. | | 9 min. | | 10 min. |
| Mode | 7 min. (14 days) | 8 min. (29 days) | | 8 min. | | 8 min. |
| No. of Days Average Delay >40 min. | 11 days | 64 days | | | | |
| Flow Control Delay ⁴ | 112 days (worst) | 182 days (worst) | | | | |
| Departures | | | | | | |
| Mean | 13 min. | 19 min. | | 12 min. | | 10 min. |
| Median | 12 min. | 15 min. | | 10 min. | | 9 min. |
| Mode | 10 min. | 12 min. | | 9 min. | | 8-9 min. |

Source: FAA CODAS database

Mean: Average delay
 Median: Half of delays greater than value shown and half less
 Mode: Amount of delay most frequently occurring and number of days (in parentheses) this delay occurred

(worst, 2nd worst): Refers to rank among other major US airports

Notes: Arrival delay includes delay caused by the destination airport (e.g., SFO), plus any delays due to problems at the origin airport.

Flow control delay is the number of days SFO caused delays in flights leaving other airports for SFO.

⁴ Number of days flow control imposed on aircraft arriving at SFO.